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Fritz Reuters, son of a shoemaker, about his life



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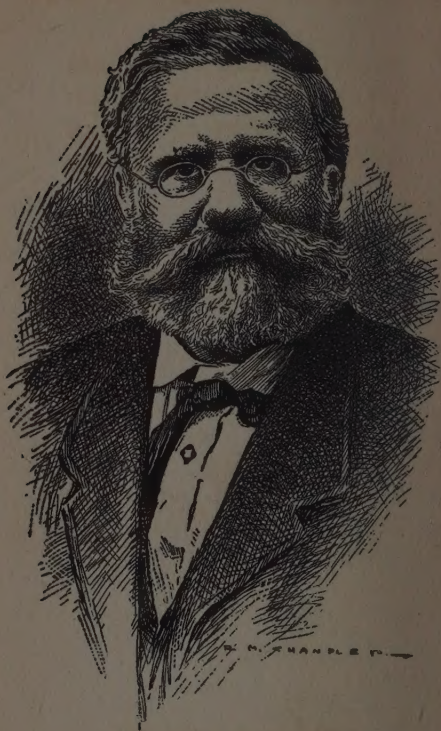
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FRITZ REUTER

SOME THINGS ABOUT HIS
LIFE AND WORK, WITH
TRANSLATIONS OF A FEW
OF HIS HUMOROUS VERSES

By

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CHARLES H. THURBER



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APOLOGIA

Twenty-five years ago I lived in Germany with a genial scholar who introduced me to Fritz Reuter's writings, and helped me over enough of the linguistic difficulties to enjoy some measure of his humor and power. In my youthful enthusiasm I purchased all of Reuter's works, which later for years adorned my library undisturbed by me or anyone else. Then came a fortnight of enforced idleness when by chance I picked up a volume of his poems and found forgetfulness of physical ills in trying my hand at translating some of them. My interest grew with what it fed upon. I read far more of Reuter's work than when I first came to know it in Germany, then I read his life, for the first time, and found it vastly interesting. Before me loomed a paper for a literary club of which I

was a member, — what better could I do than write on Reuter? I did, and as often happens in literary clubs, someone said, “You ought to have that printed.” Such a temptation is hard for any one to resist. That I resisted some two years is not so much to my credit, for I planned to extend the sketch and make more and perhaps better translations. But the time and the mood for that have not come, perhaps will not come. So I offer what I have, with no conceit that it is more than it seems.

C. H. T.

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ADOLF WILBRANDT, in his introduction to Fritz Reuter's Complete Works, calls him "the greatest German humorist of the [19th] century." Few Americans know or are likely to know from personal acquaintance with his writings how well this judgment is deserved. For Reuter was not only a humorist — and one must know a foreign language well to enjoy its humor thoroughly — but he used a dialect that few not of German birth will ever take the trouble to understand. Yet no less a man than the great Bismarck, himself a Pomeranian and so familiar with that dialect from childhood, wrote the author, in acknowledging a set of his works, —

"As old friends have I greeted the whole troop of your children and bid them all welcome, for they echo to

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me in clear, homelike tones the heart-beat of our people."

That arbiter of all knowledge, the "Kleines Konversations — Lexikon," characterizes Reuter as "a man of deep nature and homely power, whose brilliant talent as a narrator is most happily and inseparably united with the dialect of his early home." He was and is a looming figure in the literary life of Germany, though his works are not recommended for College Entrance Examinations, and he offers cheer and comfort to those who make friends with him, even to those who are denied the full enjoyment of that humor which marks but does not limit his genius.

"Who the poet will understand
Must learn to know the poet's land,"

says Goethe. This is particularly true of a dialect poet like Reuter, a poet of the people, too, who writes, not of gods and nature but of men and human nature. Not that Reuter's

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work is all poetry; a large part is prose, but the informing qualities are always the same. What was the land into which Fritz Reuter was born?

Mecklenburg was — and is to-day — a back water in the stream of life. Up to this moment it is in every way more like what it was three hundred years ago than any other state in Germany. When Fritz Reuter opened his eyes upon the scene, Mecklenburg lay like an empty shell on the seashore, separated from the outside world, living without a history between the middle ages and modern times, easy to govern, hard to change, now oppressed by want, now enjoying nature's blessings, but always conscious of one ancient heritage, a cheerful mind; and with this the Mecklenburger faced the world. The life of his neighbor states concerned him little. He won his living by agriculture, as he still does. In his flat country, where every slight

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elevation was called a mountain, between the green fat meadows and blue broad lakes, of which there are more than three hundred in the little country, he lived his bucolic life. The day laborer bound to the soil, the peasant on his hide of land, the small farm owner in the village, the lease holder of a so-called "domain," the great landed proprietor on a broad estate with a handsome residence, all surrendered themselves to the same inner partnership with mother earth. Out of this partnership developed the peculiarity of his species. There is something earthy about him. He does not reach up or stretch out; his "will to live" is not easily disturbed. He enjoys the fresh smell of the soil, whose strength he inhales; he is happy beneath the arching skies whose sunshine and whose rain nourish his dear, flat fields. Very little culture reaches him in his meadows. The limitations of his existence have made him less

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gifted with an inquiring disposition than the other relatives in the great German family. You might say that just as the newly hatched chick has a piece of shell sticking to him, so the Mecklenburger, if he becomes a city man, still has a bit of soil on his person. Faithful rather than worldly wise, with more motherwit than intellect, more receptive than inventive, more social than political, more inclined for the solid old-fashioned comfort to which he is accustomed than to try new experiences, more capable than great, such is the Mecklenburger.

The little town of Stavenhagen where Fritz Reuter was born on November 7, 1810, is in Mecklenburg-Schwerin, near the Prussian border. Reuter himself has given us a picture of it in "Schurr-Murr." It was a little farmers' village, the sole romantic feature being the old castle on the hill. The market place was adorned by the town jail. There

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was no confectioner's shop, no town musicians, not even a company of marksmen. It was enlivened at rare intervals by the visit of a Jewish peddler, and, at much rarer intervals, by a general market day. It was a town where in the "Becker-Schule" one went as far as the horn-book, in the "Küster-Schule" as far as the catechism, and in the "Rector-Schule" as far as the Bible and the Mecklenburg songbook. Here Reuter lived the first fourteen years of his life, never leaving it except for one journey with his father to Brunswick, made in his twelfth year.

His father was a man of some importance, energetic, capable, respected. He was an excellent farmer, and for more than thirty years was at the head of the government of his little town. He had no poetry and no nonsense in his makeup. With his gifted son he had no sympathy. The older Fritz grew the more father and son grew apart.

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Fritz was an only son, and his father, who intended that he should have a career, spared nothing to carry out his purpose. Fritz wanted to be a painter, his father wished that he should be a lawyer, and the son went obediently but not very industriously on the way the father marked out for him. Whatever inheritance there was of the qualities that later made him great came, as is so often the case, from the mother, whom Fritz remembered only as a gentle invalid. The father died when the son was at the most hopeless stage of a rarely checkered career and never suspected that he had sired a genius. He had had a world of trouble about the son, and died a bitterly disappointed man.

After a curious home education Fritz was sent to various schools to prepare for law and the university. In due time came the Hofrat's daughter on the scene; she poured his tea, her name was Adelaide, he wrote

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poetry to her and about her and he did not marry her. Still the attack was serious, for he wrote in 1855, "I have made a few experiments in love though with indifferent success," and later, "Once I had a good friend whom I knew as well as I knew myself — just as well — and that poor creature on a stormy rainy night in winter sat in full dress with opera glasses for three hours on the thorny branches of a plum tree just to glut himself with gazing at the lights in his sweetheart's window two hundred rods off."

At the University of Rostock he spent a single semester which left pleasant recollections if little of a more substantial residuum. "We students," he wrote, "led a cheerful life. We harried the constables and broke windows when we ought to have been asleep. We solved great social questions and founded a 'Community' which the Philistines nicknamed most disgracefully 'Com-

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monality.' We solved other important questions, as we sat in our circle. For example, one evening we discussed the weighty theme, What is honor? and although we didn't settle it as promptly as Sir John we at least drew one of its back teeth, for as my Community brethren one after the other quietly withdrew I, the freshman, had the 'honor' of paying the bill for the whole crowd."

After one semester at Rostock he went to Jena to pursue his law studies. He was a gay and harmless youth of two and twenty, clever at drawing, sociable, healthy, not over-studious. Life looked very good to him. And yet within a year he was to be in prison, he was to be sentenced to death, to have that sentence commuted to thirty years' imprisonment in a fortress, actually to spend over seven of the best years of his life in prison, there to endure hardships and suffering such as would have killed most men and did leave him

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with an incurable malady, and at thirty years of age, on being pardoned by a new King at his accession, to leave prison broken in health, with no profession, no occupation, no future. What crime did he commit that he was thus punished? In all his life he never committed any crime worse than the window-breaking of his student days at Rostock.

To explain what happened to him we must look a moment at what was going on in Jena and in Prussia. We know something of the German student organizations. They have their counterpart in our college fraternities, though the resemblance is more in superficial features than in fundamental aims. Still, one chief aim of both the German "Corps" or "Burschenschaft" and the American fraternity is goodfellowship and friendly companionship. But it was impossible that an association of students, containing as it inevitably must much of the best blood and

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brain and heart of Germany, could in those stirring times leave politics quite alone. The great war for freedom against Napoleon had sowed idealism all over the land and out of this had grown the Allgemeine Deutsche Burschenschaft, established as a permanent organization on the Wartburg in 1817. This organization was harshly suppressed, but was maintained in secret, was reorganized in 1827, and when Fritz Reuter reached Jena in 1832 it had reached the height of its political development. It must be admitted that its ideal aims were colored with a red drop or two of revolutionary blood. There were two parties, be it said, the aggressive "Germanen" and the peaceful "Arminen," but the "Germanen" just now were in the saddle and in a convention at Frankfurt in 1831 had formulated their platform as "Preparation for the introduction of a free, well-ordered civic life secured in the unity of the people. In case

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of an uprising every member of the fellowship is bound, under certain circumstances, to strive for the objects of the fellowship, even by force, and is bound to participate for this purpose in a popular insurrection if that can lead to the attainment of our purpose."

Of course Fritz Reuter joined the society. He couldn't possibly escape doing so. He was just the material of which such "Vereins" are made. He was foreordained and predestinated to that end. Equally, of course, he associated himself with the party of active "Germanen" rather than with the bovine "Arminen" of whom the derisive verses said:

" Nothing is cosier
Than to be cosy,
To drink and to sing
As sweet as a posy;
To drink and to sing
Far from the strife,
That, that is life."

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Happy days for Fritz Reuter while they lasted. But the two parties soon came to blows. Soldiers were sent over to Jena, students were forbidden to carry weapons, to shelter students from other universities, to wear the insignia of the corps, and all student associations with political tendencies were put under the ban. Both "Germanen" and "Arminen" dissolved their organizations. Fritz Reuter withdrew voluntarily, left Jena in February, and by Easter, 1833, was back home in Stavenhagen. He had done nothing worse than drink a little beer, swagger about a bit with the older students, write some humorous verses — enjoy himself generally. For a student — and a German student at that — his conscience was singularly clear.

On the 3d of April, 1833, a misguided job lot of students and demagogues stormed the main watch in Frankfurt-on-the-Main and summoned the crowd that gathered to

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follow them and fight for the "cause," they and the cause being utter strangers to the good people of Frankfurt-on-the-Main. Naturally the good people didn't follow, troops came, there was some fighting, a little killing and a great deal of running, but enough were caught to give clues which ran, vaguely enough, to several universities. At the last convention of the Burschenschaft held in Tübingen a few months before — a great and dangerous gathering of *six delegates* from as many institutions — this declaration had been adopted: "The Allgemeine Deutsche Burschenschaft shall strive for its aims, the Unity and Freedom of the people, by the path of Revolution, and to this end shall ally itself with the Union for the Fatherland in Frankfurt." This was enough for the irritated governments and the worried princes. A perfectly crazy prosecution began. All the students in the organization, together with

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numerous members of other student bodies utterly outside of political activities were seized and imprisoned. ✓ A special commission was created to investigate and prosecute them. More than a thousand young "criminals" were caught by the long arm of this prosecution, and finally Fritz Reuter.

He had passed the spring and summer quietly at home and had ✓ been quite undisturbed by his own government. The storm was passing anyway. Late in October there seemed to be no reason why he should not go to Berlin to continue his legal studies. He was a Mecklenburger, Prussia had no legal rights over him. But Prussia was big and powerful and powerfully scared as well. So Prussia arrested Fritz Reuter, gave ✓ him a farcical trial, finally condemned him to death without telling him or any one else what for, and refused again and again the demand of the Mecklenburg government that he

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should be set free. Prussia was big and powerful and Mecklenburg was small and weak. Mecklenburg might pray for justice, but that was all.

Reuter was kept for three years before sentence was passed on him. Dragged from prison to prison, denied even pen and ink, he had his eyesight permanently impaired in the dark dungeons before sentence of death was finally pronounced, graciously commuted in his case to thirty years' imprisonment, a living death, and he but twenty-six years old and quite innocent! "You must soon be free," said every one. But he was not. He was dragged again from prison to prison in the country which had no rights over him, he was deprived of air, light and heat, he was kept in a cell where no direct light ever entered, exposed to miasma, given foul water to drink, compelled, fasting, to lie for four nights in succession on the bare floor of a cell in a frightfully cold February, without any covering

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whatever. No wonder his hair began to turn gray. Small wonder, too, that he did not pursue with much success his researches into the law! It is true he carried around with him several learned works, but the sort of use he made of them he tells humorously in his "Cheerful Episodes in a Sorry Time." "I threw myself upon the bed and read Höpfner's Commentaries, a priceless book which has been of inestimable service to me in my prison career, not so much through its furthering of my legal studies as for its soothing effect. I needed to take only small doses of it to sink into a blessed forgetfulness of my condition, and although I took a few drops of it every day for seven years, I never used the prescription all up."

The later years of his imprisonment were made as comfortable for him as possible. He was sent to Mecklenburg, his own government being made responsible to Prussia for

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his safe keeping. He was given many privileges and even fell in love with the jailer's daughter, whom again he did not marry, indeed, he had no chance. Finally Frederick William the Third died and his son who succeeded him on June 7, 1840, proclaimed a complete amnesty for all those political sacrifices for the Frankfurt riot. Fritz Reuter read it in the paper, but he was not yet free. Prussia had forgotten him, Mecklenburg dared not set him free until so ordered by Prussia. After reminding Prussia and waiting a reasonable time the authorities of his native state finally took matters into their own hands and gave him back the liberty of which he had been so long, so causelessly deprived.

To this unhappy experience and these wasted years of youth the world no doubt owes the whole goodly body of Reuter's writings. But for this he would most likely have gone on with his law studies, settled down

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to practice, become a Hofrat or what not, and been long enough ago forgotten. Not only did his great misfortune lead the way at last to his fine achievements, but it also furnished him with no small part of his literary material.

He had still far to seek before finding his career. For one thing he came out of prison the victim of a peculiar and most distressing malady which it would not be pleasant to describe, which handicapped him terribly in making a new start in life and tormented him almost to the end of his days. He tried various cures, among others a water cure, from which he writes, "So much for me. I'm having a great time. Every forenoon I squat and sweat and spatter, every noon I soak and slosh and guzzle, every evening I wash and splash and sozzle. A cheerful and genial atmosphere prevails here, different from elsewhere only in this, we are all the time wishing good luck

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to all sorts of ailments and asking such questions as these: How many boils have you now? How is your scab coming on? How is the eruption on your leg? Have you any more 'work' for to-day, work meaning douching, sweating, stewing, swaddling and other cheerful exercises. Some with the greatest kindness have already prophesied to me that I have the best possible indications of a splendid case of scurvy and that I will smell horrid bad! I do the best I can to meet all these cheerful expectations. An ocean surrounds me here — rain above, waves beneath — a river has made its bed through my insides. My whole life is water. I'm sprinkled with it like a poodle dog, soused in it like an unwelcome kitten, sit in it like a frog and drink it like an ox."

He learned, at his father's wish, to be a farmer, and had no money to get a farm. His father died and left him too small a sum to live on or to

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make an opening into business. He made a good friend, a rare friend, in whose family he spent much of his time. The Revolution of 1848 struck Mecklenburg, not very hard, but enough to bring in certain assemblies in which he bore his part, finally giving up the presidency of the Reformverein of his native town because, as he told the members in his gentle yet forceful way, "You are all too stupid for me, you block-heads." So went ten years with nothing to show for them except another love affair, serious as could be this time. He was certainly a very doubtful property in the matrimonial market and the lady hesitated while her family had no hesitation whatever, they would none of him. Finally, in 1850, he settles down as a private tutor in Treptow.

Love drove him to this step. To give private lessons for ten cents an hour was, for a man of his training, his years and his temperament, the

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enterprise of despair. He gave lessons in gymnastics and drawing, even in swimming. He would teach anybody anything for ten cents an hour! He struggled, piled one dime on another and — hoped. “Hope,” he once wrote, “is like a bee: It flits from flower to flower and draws its bit of honey from each.” Still the lady hesitated, until finally his good friend Peters resolved on heroic measures. He brought his sweetheart to see him in the midst of one of his attacks. She was horrified, but she was also overcome with pity. They were married in 1851 and went to housekeeping, most modestly, in Treptow.

Fritz Reuter was now forty-one years old and for twenty years he had known little happiness. Henceforth, poor though he was in money, the world was a good place for him. Only the recurrent attacks of his illness gave him any serious trouble the rest of his life. The wife was most

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devoted, and so was the husband. Soon he would find his life work, and through it fame and modest fortune, comfort and content.

In 1852 appeared Groth's "Quick-born" which made a great success and showed the world that Plattdeutsch had literary possibilities. This set Reuter thinking. He had written Plattdeutsch jokes in rhyme, and some Plattdeutsch stories which had been well received. He was much sought after as a teller of Plattdeutsch stories, story telling being a gift very much esteemed in those parts. Living as he and his wife did within their tiny income, they were yet very much straitened in their circumstances. He was anxious to do something to earn a little more. What if he should try his hand at writing down some of the stories he had so often told? He set to work to try.

A word about the medium through which he worked. The Mecklen-

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burg Platt is a branch of the great low German linguistic trunk which is spoken in manifold dialects by the people throughout Northern Germany and beyond the confines of that region. It is still the speech of the common folk in Mecklenburg, and the educated classes are given also to its use in expressing their simpler and more characteristic thoughts and experiences. Platt, low as it is in name, has an aristocratic lineage, claiming no less distinguished an ancestor than Old Saxon. When, rather before the year 1000, that strong old language no longer sounded from human lips as living speech, there arose from the ruins two sister tongues, Middle Low German and Middle Dutch, which as the "Neder-sässische and the Nedderlendische sprake" during and beyond the middle ages in northwestern Germany and neighboring Holland, Brabant, and Flanders formed the popular languages and rejoiced in a flourishing

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literature. From here the Low German spread to the further side of the Elbe as those slavic lands were conquered by Henry the Lion and Albert the Bear and quickly colonized and Germanized, by the most part through Saxon immigrants.

In Mecklenburg, as the earlier Wend inhabitants were almost completely rooted out, there grew up as the peculiar idiom the Old Mecklenburg dialect which from 1292 on shows no inconsiderable literary content. About the time of the Reformation there is another period of literary activity. Then follows a period in which no literature is produced in the old language; it is more and more outclassed by the more elegant High German, it sinks out of public sight but never loses its hold on the people who speak it among themselves and in their homes. Toward the end of the eighteenth century a few books were published in Platt and later an unsuccessful effort was made

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to construct a grammar of the language. But the language had been too long untamed, it was too late to break it to the bit and harness of the grammarian. In fact, one language had become many dialects. Fritz Reuter himself is not at all consistent in the way he writes it, he wrote for all who spoke Platt of whatever variety. Here was a tongue, dearest of all to those who knew it, to some the only language they really knew, to many, — who had gone out in the world, gone to the schools, learned and used habitually High German, — the dear, sweet, homely and homelike language of childhood, of home. It was Platt, it was low, it was lowly, something honest enough, uncouth, ungenteel, not perhaps to be spoken or spoken of in high society, but how resonant of all that was dearest and closest in the old life, the old land, the old home! Reuter's works unfolded to the world for the first time in its full richness the linguistic

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treasures of the Mecklenburg Low German dialect, hitherto enjoyed only from lip to lip, almost in secrecy, but cherished with rare faithfulness. Reuter's talent won for it a new life. At first slowly and timidly, gradually more boldly and abundantly, finally in overwhelming completeness it conquered the hearts and the interest of all who spoke Platt, and this carried beyond the little fatherland of Mecklenburg, far beyond the confines of Germany itself. Reuter made the dear old tongue world famous and world honored. Perhaps this is sufficient excuse, if he needed any, for his choice of Platt as his medium of expression. Very sure it is that scarcely another name in literary history has done as much for any tongue as Reuter did for Platt.

But as Shakespeare wrote Macbeth with no prophetic vision of the needs of the Committee on College Entrance Requirements in English, so Fritz Reuter started to write quite

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unconscious of any greater purpose or higher call than the very worthy one of doing better by his dear wife. He began to put into rhyme the jokes and quips he had heard and told all his life. Nearly every evening, as his wife tells us, after finishing six or seven private lessons, from eight to ten o'clock he wrote "Läuschen." "I want to see how the 'things' look on paper, to see whether they look as though they belonged there," he said. When one of the "things" was done he would read it to his wife and if she approved he would jump about in excitement, rub his hands and say, "Sunday I'll read that to the Thalbergs; if they like it I'll go ahead with more. I've lots more such stuff in my pack." Perhaps it was "Free Delivery," "The Help," or "The Belltongue," "The Cards," or "The Socratic Method," offered further on in translation as samples of this part of Reuter's work. These are from the "Läuschen un Rimels,"

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his first book, and his own words in the preface to the first edition are their best apologia.

“ If any one came into our room with an apology for taking such a liberty, and left with an apology for taking such a liberty, that might be a proof of his good bringing up but it would scarcely be called entertaining. So I would have to act towards my readers, I would have to make my excuses and make them over again, first for the insignificance of my material, second for the many faults in form, and, third, for something which no other writer has to make excuses for, the unwieldiness of the language. But all this would be a bit tiresome and no matter how cleverly I made my apologies my offense against good taste would at most be passed over in silence for the moment. My poems are not like the children of the higher classes, with small ears, aristocratic hands, slender forms and delicate complexions, which have

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a tender, considerate reception everywhere and thank you for it in precise and elegant language. By no means. They are, or are intended to be, a gang of street urchins, who pummel one another about lustily in rude health, untroubled by æsthetic considerations, whose towheads burst with laughter and who now and then crack a joke at the folly of the world. The theatre of their merriment is not the polished floor of princely salons, not the rich, many-colored carpet of delicate boudoirs. Their world is the open market place, the dusty main-traveled road of life, where they rush and tumble about, tread on the toes of solemn faced dignitaries, shout a merry jest to the homeward returning peasant, make fun of the constable, make up faces at the warden, and forget to take off their caps to the pastor. Well, jump and shout, you little rascals! Your fun will soon be over. When you get among strangers you will catch

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it! I am armed in advance against the literary critics. There is just one thing might disturb me. If honest peasant Jock Pesel should suddenly take a notion to pay me a visit with his stout walking stick and make bold to inquire why I had made so free with some of the incidents of his life, and should ask me, 'Now, sir, what is this you have done to me and my wife,' that, I confess, would be unpleasant. So I hasten to declare that neither Pesel nor Schulze, Miller, nor Schmidt, Schroeder nor any other proper name whatever stands for any person by that name."

It is one more proof of the unerring judgment of publishers that Fritz Reuter could not get one to undertake this first book of his, even if he bore the expense. The best he could do was to get one to consider the matter! But his blood was up now; he would publish it himself. A good friend loaned him the money to pay

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the printer, and in a fine burst of courage he ordered twelve hundred copies. "But, Fritz," protested the wife, "you will overwhelm us with debt." No matter, the "things" must be published. He wrote himself to all the booksellers in Mecklenburg and Pomerania, and a few orders came, mostly "on approval." When the books arrived the wife toiled all day wrapping them in stiff paper, the husband wrote the addresses and the letters. "Don't be vexed, Louise, if your hands get calloused. You'll get a new silk dress out of this." So the book went forth to an immediate and sure success. The first edition disappeared in six weeks.

His later career is well worth the telling, but, after all, the period of success and triumph is not so interesting as the long struggle that preceded. He started a weekly story paper, a sort of New York *Ledger*, written mostly by himself. That lasted a year, when the publisher vanished

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with the accounts. In 1858 he enjoyed Mark Twain's experience of reading his own death notice, and took the matter up with great energy, writing to the *Stralsund Zeitung* as follows: "As I have an objection that most people will easily understand to being buried alive, please be so kind as to dig me up out of number 268 of your esteemed paper," and he inserted the following advertisement in the *Stettin Zeitung*:

"I dead? I'm sure of no such mind,
The thing is too much hurried;
And while I live, I am, I find,
In no haste to be buried."

He was very busy after he once started on his career and left a considerable body of literature, a large part in prose, wherein he turned to artistic account all the varied and cruel experiences of his early life. He is never bitter, and about the worst he does to his enemies is to make fun of them. Money, fame,

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almost adoration, came to him quickly. His later years were passed in ideal surroundings at Eisenach, where he built a charming villa at the foot of the Wartburg. Here he died in 1874.

People who really know Reuter's works speak of him not as of Goethe or Schiller or Lessing, but with the warmth of real affection. His writings are more than funny, they are the work of a fine humorist who is always a philosopher at bottom. And there is an intimate quality, a homeliness about Reuter's writings that won and keeps the affections of every Plattdeutscher. "We Low Dutch are like hard wood that is slow to take fire, but glows for a long time," wrote Fritz Reuter. He certainly was slow to take fire, not beginning his life work until he reached middle age. In this he was a great contrast to Dickens, with whom he has been compared. Although in outward circumstances he

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and Dickens have little in common, yet the essential nature of their work is very similar. Reuter's words, "In the lower walks of life virtues and vices stand before us in greater nakedness, freed from those encumbering garments which we call 'discretion,' 'circumstances,' 'culture,' and they must therefore appear to us more poetical," are certainly not inapplicable to Dickens' work, nor are these, "Who can tell where joy and sorrow part? They play so wonderfully across each other in the human heart. They are the warp and the woof, and blessed is the man who can weave a firm texture out of both."



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FREE DELIVERY

The letter gave postmaster Jacob much
care,

He wasn't quite sure that the party lived
where

The address said she should, so he
cautioned the carrier,

"You get that thing right or, by Godfrey,
I'll harry yer."

He returned. Jacob asked him, "You
found that address?"

"Yes, master, be sure, but I had such a
mess!

That letter for Anna Samantha Marie,
Who should live at the Engle's down there
by the sea,

Took me out by the hills where the way
isn't plain —

I hope that you'll not send me out there
again.

Second story it said, there was none as I
tell it,

There was just an old cellar — say, you
ought to smell it!

And Anna Samantha don't live there at all,
An old washerwoman moved in this last
fall.

FRITZ REUTER

I gave her the letter, — she does n't get
many, —
And Anna Samantha can go without any! ”

THE HELP

“ We'll never get that hay in dry! ”
We hear old Farmer Fisher cry.
“ John, John,” he hollers to his help,
“ Where in the dickens is that whelp? ”
John's head pokes out beneath the straw,
“ What do you want? Hier bin ich ja.”
“ You answer quicker when I call;
What were you doing? Tell it all.”
“ Well, master, when one feels the heat
The doctor says 'tis bad to eat;
As dinner comes an hour from now
I took a nap to cool my brow.”
“ Where's Christian then? ” old Fisher
cried.
“ I'm right here, master,” he replied,
As from the straw he slowly crept
From the same spot where John had slept.
“ What were you doing? ” Fisher thundered
on.
“ Oh, nothing much, sir. I was helping
John.”

FRITZ REUTER

THE BELLTONGUE

There's a rare sort of cake they make down
in Grabow
With caraway seed and I don't know just
how.
"Belltongue" they call it, it sells for a
shilling,
It's rich and it's heavy, it's tasty and filling.
Made and *was* I should say, I have used a
wrong tense,
I write of old days when the people had
sense.
Now those cakes I dare say are no bigger
than plums
And sell without doubt for exorbitant
sums.
To Grabow one day came the clodhopper
Hans
Who had dressed for the city by shoving
his pants
In the tops of his boots; it was easily felt
That his intellect lay in the zone of his
belt.
To Hagen's bakeshop he went and threw
down a shilling,
Demanding a belltongue — Old Hagen
was willing.

FRITZ REUTER

He ate it in silence as though at
devotion,

And then for a second he found he'd a
notion.

Down went number two, but without
satisfaction,

He set off down the street to seek out
quicker action.

To Schmidt's fine new bakeshop he now
took his way,

Demanded a belltongue and threw down
the pay.

As he ate a broad smile soon illumined
his face,

And full and content he went out from the
place.

Just outside by a chance he espied an old
friend

Who it seemed now had also some money
to spend.

"Where you going?" he cried as he quick-
ened his pace.

"I'm going to Hagen's where I'll feed my
face

On the finest sweet belltongue you get in
Grabow."

"Now don't go to Hagen's and I'll tell you
how

FRITZ REUTER

He swindled me soundly right out of two
shilling,
Schmidt here is your man, his belltongues
are filling;
But Hagen's no good, I ate two in his place,
I might just as well have put nowt in my
face;
Then I came up to Schmidt's where I've
had only one
And my stomach already is aching like
fun."

THE CARDS

Baron von Sprudelwitz, very much pressed,
Drew on his gloves and stood fully dressed.
Behind him stood John in his cap and his
cape
Doing all that he could his fine master to
ape.
To himself the sleek baron was muttering
low,
"It's horrible how I am pressed, I must go,
'*Blesse oblige*, calls to make, Oh alas! it is so.
How I wish, yes I do, 'pon honor *auf taille*
That to-day I was one of the stupid *canaille*.
No need for me then to dress up and
prance

FRITZ REUTER

Around making calls — I could see the
new dance!

But horrible fate, cruel, wicked, instead,
All these stupid visits now heaps on my
head.

But perhaps after all it may not be so hard,
I'll hurry and everywhere just leave a card.
John, drive on, Hans will go the good horse
to hold, —

You've the cards, have you, John, just as
you were told? "

" They are here, Herr Baron, I can tell
by their heft,

They were in the old cupboard right there
on the left."

" *Ah bon!* and *Allons, en avant,*" cries the
master.

" Hans, see if you can't make the old nag go
faster.

Hurry, John, get right down and run up to
the door,

Don't wait there too long, we must make
twenty more.

If no one comes out when you quickly
knock twice

Shove under a card and run back in a
trice."

And so they cavorted all over Schwerin

FRITZ REUTER

And by excellent management found no
one in.

Now they're headed towards home, with
but one call to fear,

Von Sprudelwitz cries in the faithful John's
ear,

"John, you've a clean card for these fussy
old maids? "

"I've a fine one, my master, the big ace
of spades."

THE SOCRATIC METHOD

The school inspector of Axenstand —
His name was Ix, his bearing grand —
Was making the rounds of the schools and
came

To a town of no resounding fame
Called Obserin, wherein he found
Schoolmaster Rosengraün held the ground.
To examine the school and the master too
Ix set to work and made Rosengraün stew.
The poor old master was in a bad fix,
But no help he found as he faced the wise Ix.
Old Rosengraün was in a great sweat,
Whatever he knew he seemed to forget;
And the wretched children, in spite of his
pricks,

FRITZ REUTER

Lost all of their wits and stood like dumb
sticks;

While our good inspector leaned back in his
chair

And dazzled them with his omniscient air.

But things went better than you might
suppose,

For old Ix had enjoyed a good night's
repose,

And now was digesting, as full well he
knew,

An excellent breakfast sufficient for two.

So he said to old Rosengrahn soon with a
smile,

Complacent and childlike, quite free from
all guile,

"You use the old methods, my friend, yet
I find

The method Socratic is more to my mind."

"I don't know what that is," said Rosen-
grahn sadly,

"If you'll show me how I'll use it most
gladly."

"That's the easiest thing in the world,"
Ix replied.

Pointing then to an urchin, "Come here,
son," he cried.

FRITZ REUTER

“ Now don’t be afraid, do not stammer or
frown,

Tell me what is the river that runs by this
town?

Come, come, do not hurry, you have time
to think.

It will come to you soon as quick as a wink.

You don’t know? Why, that’s easy;
when wrong you have done

How will you feel ere the setting of sun?

You’ll feel *sorry* of course, now how easy
’twill seem

To turn ‘ r ’ into ‘ l ’ for the name of the
stream.

Now into what stream does the old Solly
flow?

Now, children, think carefully, go very
slow.

Tell me now what it is that comes down
from the sky?

Rain? Yes, and what else? Snow?
Dew? One more try ” —

“ I know it now, master,” sang out Johnny
Knak,

“ It’s hail.” “ Right, my boy, at the very
first crack.

You see now we’re having a whole lot of
fun;

FRITZ REUTER

Change the 'i' to a 'v' and the whole thing is done.

The Solly flows into the Havl, that's plain;
But how does the Havl get down to the Main?

I'm sure some one here will quickly know this.

No one does? Then come here, you shy little miss,

I'll help you, you'll see then how easy 'twill be

To learn how the Havl gets down to the

Count for me, one, two, three, four, five, six and seven,

Eight, nine, that's right, go along, ten, eleven —

That's enough, stop right there and drop off the 'even'

El, *Elbe*, why teaching this way is like heaven!

The Havl flows into the Elbe, 'tis true;

You see now how easy you find out things new."

Then Rosengrahn spoke up to Inspector Ix,
"I think now I've learned these new Socratic tricks.

FRITZ REUTER

To put my knowledge to test 'neath your
masterly eye
A Socratic lesson myself I would try."
"Go right on," said old Ix, "by all means,
that's the way
To settle forever what you've learned to-
day."

So Rosengraün started, "Now, children,
you see
You've reached to the Elbe, please go on
with me.
By Hamburg flows the Elbe, first of all,
A city filled with houses great and tall;
And there are many ships, as you may
know,
Now let's see how much farther we can
go.
The ships that come to Hamburg cannot
stay,
They must go back or go the other way.
To the great ocean really they must go,
But to what ocean who of you may know?
Not one can answer? Come here, Charley
Schree;
Don't be afraid, it's easy, count for me,
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,
eight, and nine,

STUDENT OF THE
COLUMBIA, MO.
FRITZ REUTER

Ten, eleven, twelve, — stop there!" cried
Rosengrafin.

"Now tell me where the Elbe empties
quick,

I know I've got somewhere the little brick
Who knows the answer. What? Can no
one tell?

It's very easy, as I know quite well;
Think twelve, think hard, what word does
twelve imply?

Twelve, twelve, don't gawk and never
blink an eye.

Twelve, twelve, you blockheads, **TWELVE**,
that gives the clew,

TWELVE means the GERMAN OCEAN —
class is through."

PT 4848 .R5 T47

Thurber, Charles Herbert,
1864-

Fritz Reuter

